Intacto

—"Right now you're the only thing that's making any sense to me."

The Veronicas – Untouched

A full week of agonizing silence and physical exhaustion had passed since Tui's furious confrontation. Hong had spent those days trapped inside his own dark, smoke-filled apartment, unspooling under the weight of his fifteen-year-old trauma and the crushing guilt of his isolation. The walls had become smaller and smaller. The air had become thicker. The isolation had become suffocating.

But tonight, he needed to drown out the noise in his head with a louder, cruder kind of noise.

The raw, abrasive distortion of the guitars tore through the speakers, shaking the sticky floorboards beneath Hong's boots. The venue was packed—a shifting mass of bodies clad in dark fabrics, the air thick with cigarette smoke and spilled beer and the specific electricity of people gathering to feel something. But to Hong, it felt like he was standing in the middle of an abandoned room.

The bass frequencies vibrated so violently in his chest that he couldn't think about fifteen-year-old promises. Couldn't think about Nut's confused voice asking why are you mad at me? Couldn't think about the crushing guilt of disappearing for a week and leaving everyone to suffer in the silence.

The band screamed. The crowd surged. Hong stood invisible in the dark.

When Hong had first seen the gig poster on social media days ago, he had bought the ticket on pure impulse. Normally, this was the exact kind of event that would have triggered a flurry of activity in their group chat. He would have sent the digital flyer to "The Chaos," followed by a barrage of sarcastic remarks, demanding to know which of the boys were going to join him so they could complain about the bad beer together.

And the responses would have arrived like clockwork. Tui would have made a joke about something he'd read online. William would have asked about lighting (for photography purposes). Nut would have offered to drive. Lego would have announced an outfit plan with three exclamation points.

Est would have read the message and smiled quietly at his phone.

But now, looking at the dark, frozen screen of his phone, everything just felt empty.

When he had first arrived at the bar, the sheer sensory overload had offered a temporary reprieve. He'd pushed his way to the front of the queue, ordered himself

a strong drink with a shaky, silver-ringed hand, and let himself be entirely absorbed by the deafening noise of the band and the chaotic energy of the crowd pressing in around him.

He wanted the bass frequencies to vibrate so violently in his chest that he couldn't think. That was the goal. Oblivion through decibels.

Yet, as the set rolled on, the illusion faded.

The louder the music screamed, the more the crowd surged and laughed around him, the deeper the isolation settled under his skin. Standing there in his unzipped black hoodie and low-slung ripped jeans, surrounded by hundreds of strangers, Hong only felt more profoundly alone. He was entirely invisible in the dark. Trapped behind the heavy armor of his own silence.

As soon as Lego had found out through a mutual friend that Hong had bought a ticket to the underground gig, he hadn't hesitated. He had bought a ticket for the exact same night, desperate to check on his friend after a week of zero contact. A week of Hong's silence. A week of Lego carrying a weight that was slowly consuming him.

The venue was chaos—bodies pressed together, the air thick with smoke and sweat and the specific desperation of people trying to feel something real. Lego pushed through the crowd, searching.

And then he found him.

Hong was at one of the tables in the back, and he looked completely unanchored from the polished, careful world of the university music wing. His chemical-silver hair was chaotic and uncombed, falling in messy clumps over his eyes. He wasn't wearing an ounce of his usual makeup, leaving the stark, exhausted shadows under his eyes fully exposed to the flickering indigo stage lights.

His nails were painted a chipped, heavily worn black. His fingers idly tapped against a half-empty glass—the third one Lego could count on the bar in front of him.

He was dressed in a massive, oversized black hoodie left completely unzipped, hanging loosely off his sloping shoulders to reveal a faded gray tank top beneath. His ripped, wide-legged jeans sat low on his hips, slightly revealing the black strap of his underwear against his pale skin.

He looked rough. Pale. Incredibly beautiful in a destructive, hollow way.

Lego took a deep breath, steeling himself against the crushing wall of sound vibrating through the venue, and adjusted his clothes.

Tonight, he wore his hair tied up in a casual half-ponytail, trying to keep it out of his face in the humid crowd. He was dressed in fitted black jeans and a black off-the-shoulder top, layered over with an oversized denim jacket—one he had stolen from Hong's closet a long time ago and never quite found the heart to return. It smelled like Hong. Like cigarettes and cologne and the specific scent of someone you knew so well that their smell became a language.

Pushing his way through the shifting mass of bodies, Lego kept his eyes locked on that familiar, messy crown of silver hair. He was completely determined to break down the freezing barrier that had separated them for the past week.

As Lego drew closer, the blue and crimson stage lights cut across the bar counter, exposing the small fortress Hong had built around himself.

It was only 11 p.m., but Hong had already been drinking heavily. He was hunched slightly over the sticky wood of the bar, holding onto three glasses lined up right in front of him, as if the physical barrier of the alcohol could keep the rest of the world from reaching him.

His chipped black nails clicked against the glass rim. His pale face looked entirely detached from the chaos around him. Like he was already gone, already dissolved into the noise.

Lego approached from behind, not wanting to startle him but needing to be close. He slipped stealthily onto the empty stool next to Hong, intentionally bumping his shoulder against Hong's low, unbuttoned sweatshirt. The gesture was small. Deliberate. A physical reassurance.

Hong glanced over.

The moment his eyes registered Lego's face, his expression shifted—from empty to something more present, more real. And then he saw the denim jacket draped over Lego's shoulders. His jacket. The one Lego had stolen months ago.

"I missed you." Lego said simply.

Hong tried to put on his usual sarcastic mask, but seeing Lego dressed in his clothes made it incredibly difficult to keep his distance. The mask cracked. The armor loosened.

Hong reached for his glass with a shaky hand, his silver rings clinking loudly against the rim. Before his fingers could wrap around it, Lego reached out and gently but firmly placed his hand over Hong's chipped black nails, stopping him.

"Tui told me he came to your apartment days ago," Lego said quietly. His voice cut through the noise of the band. "I hope you didn't say anything rude to him. He was just trying to help."

Hong stared at Lego in his off-the-shoulder top and half-ponytail. He noticed how pale and exhausted Lego looked. How thin his face had become. Tui's warning echoed in Hong's mind, louder than the grunge band. Hong looked at Lego's hand covering his, preventing him from reaching for another drink.

"Why did you come here, Lego?" Hong asked, his voice hoarse. "You're supposed to be mad at me."

Lego didn't take his hand away. Instead, he gently squeezed his fingers, holding his hand like an anchor.

"You're my best friend," Lego said. His voice was soft but steady against the roaring bass. "You're the only one who didn't give me weird looks about my nails or piercings when I arrived at that photo studio. I can't be mad at you, just like I can't be mad at Tui or William or P'Nut." He paused, his eyes finding Hong's in the dark. "You're my person."

Hong looked at the stolen denim jacket on Lego's shoulders. Then back at Lego's pale face. The last remnants of his eight-year armor completely dissolved under the warmth of his friend's hand. A heavy, ragged breath escaped his throat. The suffocating weight of his silence finally breaking.

"I'm sorry," Hong said, holding Lego's hand like it was the only real thing left in the world. "I didn't want to hurt anyone, Especially not you."

"I know," Lego said. His eyes shone under the indigo stage lights. "Then stop drinking this cheap alcohol and let's get out of here."

They stepped out of the grimy, smoke-filled underground venue and into the cool, humid Bangkok night air. The sudden quiet felt like a physical relief to Hong, whose body was still weak and depleted after a week of being unwell. The taxi ride back to Lego's apartment was quiet.

When they arrived at Lego's apartment, the space was safe, warm, and completely insulated from the chaos of their fracturing group. Lego immediately went to the kitchen to brew some warm ginger tea to help settle Hong's stomach—the same gesture Tui had made for him the morning after his own breakdown. Care delivered through the small ritual of heat and healing.

Hong threw his massive black hoodie over the back of a chair and collapsed onto Lego's big, comfortable bed, staring up at the ceiling. His body felt like lead. His mind felt empty. But for the first time in a week, the emptiness didn't feel permanent.

Lego walked back into the bedroom, carrying two steaming mugs. His hair still tied back in the half-ponytail. His movements gentle, careful, like he was handling something fragile. He handed a mug to Hong and sat cross-legged on the edge of

the mattress.

Hong accepted the warm mug, his fingers brushing against Lego's as the steam curled up between them, carrying the sharp, comforting scent of ginger. He looked around the quiet bedroom, feeling the last lingering vibrations of the grunge band finally fade from his chest.

The silence here didn't feel heavy or suffocating like it did in his own apartment. It felt safe. Like a place where broken things could rest.

"Thank you for coming," Hong said. His voice was barely a whisper. "I didn't think anyone would."

"I'll always come for you." Lego said simply.

They sat in silence, drinking their tea.

After a few minutes, with a quiet click of his tongue, Hong reached into the deep pocket of his wide-legged jeans and pulled out a small, neatly rolled joint. He looked up at Lego, a silent, questioning tilt of his head asking for permission. Lego didn't hesitate. He grabbed his lighter from the nightstand, and together, the two of them stepped out onto the humid balcony of the apartment, leaving the bedroom door slightly ajar behind them.

The night air was thick, a blanket of dark clouds still hiding the sky just as it had all week.

Hong leaned his elbows against the balcony railing. His gray tank top shifted slightly as he struck the lighter. The small flame illuminated the sharp, makeup-free lines of his face and the dark shadows under his eyes. He took a slow, deep drag, the tip glowing a bright, hot orange. The smoke curled around his face like something alive, something real.

He passed it over to Lego. Lego took a hit, his off-the-shoulder top slipping slightly as he exhaled a thin, sweet cloud of smoke into the midnight air. He took a sip of his tea, using the warmth to cut through the dryness in his throat.

"You look terrible, P'Hong," Lego said quietly, looking at the blinking lights in the alley below. "Tui wasn't exaggerating. You've been out of control all week."

Hong let out a dry, raspy laugh. The smoke curled around his messy silver hair as he leaned his head back against the concrete wall. The joint was already starting to take effect, softening the rigid, defensive edges of his mind. The world was becoming slightly softer. The pain slightly more bearable.

"I know," Hong said. His voice cracked slightly. "My body feels like lead. Tui came to my house and opened my eyes. He was right, Lego. I've been sitting in the dark, smoking and pretending I exist in a vacuum because I'm a coward."

Lego's lower lip trembled slightly, but he didn't cry this time. He managed a tiny, genuine smile, leaning his head against Hong's shoulder as they watched the smoke disappear into the dark, hidden sky.

"I'm giving you your voice back, Lego," Hong said quietly, stroking Lego's cheek with surprising tenderness. "You don't have to carry my secret anymore. Tell them. Tell Tui. Tell whoever you need to."

Lego took a long, thoughtful drag of the joint, the cherry glowing bright against the backdrop of the dark Bangkok alley below. He exhaled slowly, the sweet smoke mingling with the steam from his ginger tea.

"You know you need to talk to Nut sooner or later, P'Hong," Lego said delicately. "You can't stay on this balcony forever. You can't stay in the dark forever. It's going to destroy you."

Hong's fingers tightened around his mug. His chipped black nails clicked sharply against the ceramic. He shook his head. His messy silver hair obscured his eyes as he stared resolutely at the floor of the balcony, at the concrete that held them suspended between earth and sky.

"I'm not ready," Hong said. His voice was a raspy whisper. "Maybe I never will be. It's easier to just—let it fade into the smoke. Let it be something that happened in the past that doesn't matter anymore."

"It matters," Lego said firmly. His voice carried a strength that surprised them both. "You matter. And Nut—he's out there spiraling because he thinks he's lost his best friend, and he doesn't even know the reason why. You can't heal something you don't acknowledge. And you can't expect Nut to fix something he doesn't know is broken."

Hong let out a sharp, cynical breath that wasn't quite a laugh.

"What if acknowledging it makes it worse?" Hong asked, his voice rising slightly, panic creeping in. "What if telling him how I feel means losing him completely? We're not fifteen anymore, Lego. We're friends now. He doesn't seem romantically interested in me at all—he's spent the last few weeks obsessed with Est. I have no right to be jealous."

"You're already losing him by living in the dark, P'Hong," Lego said, his eyes glistening with tears. "You're watching him through a screen, assuming he doesn't feel anything for you, but how can he show you anything when you've locked all the doors? You're letting him be 'friends' with a version of you that doesn't exist, while the real you is suffering right in front of him."

The words hit Hong like a punch. Because they were true. Because Lego had seen him in the dark for a week and had understood exactly what the darkness was

doing. Hong stared at Lego for a long, quiet moment. His bare eyes softened.

The mask was completely gone now. There was nothing left but the person underneath. The broken person. The scared person. The person who had loved and lost and was terrified of loving again.

"Okay," Hong said finally. "Okay. I'll talk to him. Not tonight. Not tomorrow. But soon. I'll be brave. For you. For him. For myself."

Lego's shoulders sagged with relief.

And then Hong did something that surprised them both. Slowly, he leaned in. He gave Lego a light, lingering kiss on the lips. Not passionate. Not demanding. Just—a kiss. When he pulled back slightly, his thumb gently brushed against the sleeve of the denim jacket Lego had stolen from him so long ago.

A bittersweet smile tugged at the corner of Hong's mouth. His raspy voice dropped to a warm, affectionate whisper. "I would have liked to fall madly in love with you," Hong said. "It's so easy to talk to you, Shorty. You see me. You actually see me."

Lego blinked. His heart did a small, startled flip inside his chest. He looked at Hong's uncombed silver hair. His chipped black nails. The absolute sincerity resting on his pale face. Lego let out a soft, breathy laugh, leaning his shoulder back against Hong's as they shared the remaining warmth of their ginger tea.

The silence on the balcony finally felt like a sanctuary instead of a cage.

The sweet, lingering haze of the joint and the sharp warmth of the ginger tea slowly dissolved into the quiet room as they stepped back inside from the humid balcony, leaving the night air behind them. The staggering emotional exhaustion of the entire week finally caught up to both of them all at once. With the clear air of the apartment and the absolute safety of the space wrapping around them, their eyelids grew impossibly heavy.

Without a shred of the rigid armor he had worn all week, Hong collapsed back onto the large, comfortable mattress alongside Lego. They shared the bed, lying shoulder-to-shoulder in the dim light, staring up at the dark ceiling as the distant hum of Bangkok faded into nothingness. Lego turned onto his side, the sleeve of Hong's stolen denim jacket shifting slightly as he placed his hand close to Hong's.

"Don't let that dark part of your mind come back, Hoshi. I don't want to be alone." Lego says, his voice soft, carrying a rare, vulnerable weight.

Hong turned his head on the white pillowcase, his chemical-silver hair beautifully tousled against the fabric. Looking at the younger boy who had quite literally dragged him out of the dark, his bare eyes softened completely.

"I won't." Hong says, closing his eyes, his raspy voice dropping to a whisper. Leaning

in with a quiet, grounding affection, Hong gave Lego a couple more soft kisses, which Lego gently returned—a silent pact sealed in the dark room. But as they pulled apart, Lego’s practical, protective nature flickered back to life, breaking the heavy emotional air with a breathy laugh.

He looked down at Hong's low-slung, ripped wide-legged jeans, still covered in the invisible grime of the underground venue. "I'll lend you pajamas. I won't let you sleep in my bed in those jeans from the bar." Lego says, Nudging Hong's hip firmly. A genuine, easy smile broke across Hong's face in the dark.

When Hong's eyes finally fluttered open, the suffocating, heavy dark that had anchored itself in his chest for the past week had completely receded. Warm Bangkok sunlight filtered softly through Lego's window blinds, cutting across the room in long, lazy golden stripes.

Beside him, Lego was still deeply asleep. His body leaning naturally against Hong's side for warmth. He had one of the fluffy bed pillows clutched tightly in his arms, his face half-buried in the fabric. He was wearing a loose, oversized pajama top that hung off his shoulders, paired with a set of soft pink underwear. His hair had come loose from the half-ponytail during the night, falling across his face in dark, chaotic waves.

In the gentle clarity of the morning sun, Hong's eyes traced down to Lego's exposed leg, where he could see the faint, pale scars on his thigh. They were barely visible now, silvered by time, but they served as a quiet reminder of everything. Of the pain. Of the struggle. Of the fact that Lego had also been broken and had learned to keep going anyway.

Hong, currently wearing nothing but the borrowed pajama bottoms Lego had practically forced him into the night before, carefully shifted his weight. He didn't want to wake Lego just yet, so he quietly slipped out from under the covers.

His bare feet padded softly across the cool floorboards as he made his way to the bathroom. Standing before the mirror, he looked at his reflection. His chemical-silver hair was a wild, uncombed mess. His face was entirely bare, stripped of the sharp makeup mask he usually wore like a shield. The dark circles were still there—marks of the week he'd spent in isolation. But his eyes were clearer than they'd been in days.

He turned on the tap, letting the cold water pool in his silver-ringed hands, and splashed it over his face, washing away the last lingering traces of the alcohol and the heavy exhaustion.

When he returned to the bedroom, the mattress shifted slightly under his weight as he climbed back into the safe sanctuary of the sheets. Lego hadn't fully woken up,

but his eyes were open just a sliver, watching Hong's movements through his long, dark eyelashes.

Without a word, Hong slid closer. He let his head sink down to snuggle comfortably against Lego's stomach, finding an immediate, grounding warmth there.

Lego didn't protest.

Instinctively, his fingers reached up. His hand tangled softly into Hong's messy silver hair, gently stroking the strands in a slow, rhythmic motion that made Hong want to close his eyes all over again. The touch was safe. Healing. Like medicine delivered through fingertips.

Enjoying the domestic ease of the morning, a sudden spark of his usual playful energy flickered to life. Hong shifted his head slightly and gave Lego a little, intentional nudge right on his thigh, right next to where his pink underwear ended.

"Shouldn't you save that kind of stuff for Tui?" Hong said. A raspy, amused whisper, a smirk playing on his lips.

Lego's hand paused in Hong's hair for a fraction of a second as the teasing comment registered in his sleepy brain.

A soft blush immediately crept up his neck. With a breathy, embarrassed huff, he gently pushed Hong's head away from his stomach. There was absolutely no real force behind it, but the gesture was clear: you're being a pest.

"I have nicer sets for that." Lego said, turning his face slightly into the pillow. His voice was muffled but defensive.

Hong let out a genuine, booming laugh that echoed lightly against the quiet walls of the bedroom. His chest shook against the mattress. It was the first time he had laughed like that in what felt like an eternity. Completely unburdened by the iron gag of his secrets.

He tilted his head back up, his eyes bright as he looked at Lego's flushing cheeks. "You sound so cheeky today, Shorty," Hong said. "I like it. It means you're not worried anymore."

Lego simply rolled his eyes through his sleepy haze. But he was smiling. The smile was real. The smile was relief.

Hong quietly slipped out from under the covers once more, careful not to disturb the rhythmic rise and fall of Lego's chest as the younger boy drifted back into a light sleep. Leaving Lego to rest a little longer in the warm sunlight, Hong padded barefoot back into the kitchen.

The apartment was completely still. The only sound being the low hum of the refrigerator and the distant noise of Bangkok waking up outside the windows. Still wearing nothing but Lego's borrowed pajama bottoms, Hong began to move around the kitchen counter, setting up the coffee maker to brew a fresh pot.

He moved with a strange kind of grace that came from muscle memory, The rich, dark aroma of the coffee was just beginning to fill the room, cutting through the last remnants of the heavy week, when a sudden click from the front door broke the silence.

The door swung open.

Tui walked into the apartment. He stopped dead in his tracks the exact moment his eyes landed on the kitchen.

There stood Hong—messy silver hair, bare chest, and unmistakably wearing Lego's pajama bottoms. For a long, tense second, the memory of their furious confrontation on the concrete stairs a week ago seemed to flash between them. The moment when Tui's patience had finally cracked.

Tui froze.

His eyes scanned Hong's relaxed posture and the borrowed clothes. His mind jumped to conclusions—the pajama bottoms, the intimate domestic ease, the fact that Hong and Lego were clearly very comfortable with each other. A sharp, unmistakable pang of jealousy tightened in Tui's chest.

But then—

Tui looked closer at Hong's bare, unmasked face. And the anger didn't come. Instead, a wave of profound relief washed over him. Hong didn't look like a ghost spinning out of control anymore. His shoulders had settled. His face had color. His eyes, while tired, were no longer completely hollow.

Lego was no longer carrying the crushing weight alone.

Tui was genuinely happy to see Hong alive, breathing, and finally out of the dark. Breaking the heavy silence, Tui lifted a plastic bag he was holding. A small, genuine smile cracked through his guarded expression.

"I brought you guys breakfast," Tui said, setting the heavy bag down on the counter. "I wasn't sure if you'd eaten yet. Lego texted me around midnight saying you two were heading here, so I grabbed some things on the way over this morning."

The rich, dark aroma of the brewing coffee began to mingle with the warm scent of toasted brioche as Hong and Tui moved around the small kitchen counter. The initial tension between them completely evaporated into the morning sunlight.

Tui busied himself with emptying the plastic bag he had brought, pulling out containers of hot breakfast—pad thai, khao tom—while Hong stood by the sink, idly rinsing a knife to slice up a platter of fresh mangoes and dragon fruit.

"Thank you," Hong said quietly. His voice was different now—not guarded, not strategic, just—genuine. "For coming to my apartment. For not letting me disappear completely."

Tui paused in his arrangement of the food containers.

"You scared me," Tui said, his voice low, honest. "Seeing you like that—completely gone, I've never seen you like that before."

"I know," Hong said. He leaned his hip against the counter, his borrowed pajama bottoms hanging low as he deftly sliced through the fruit, his silver rings clinking faintly against the ceramic cutting board. "I was scared too. I think that's why I ran."

"But you came back," Tui said.

"Because of Lego," Hong said. He glanced sideways at Tui. "He dragged me out of the dark. Literally showed up at the worst venue in Bangkok and pulled me back to the light."

A pause.

Then Hong said: "You should just ask him out on a real date, Tui."

Tui froze, the kettle hovering mid-air for a fraction of a second before he carefully set it down. He rubbed the back of his neck, a sudden wave of uncertainty clouding his features as he looked over at Hong.

"How do you even know that?" Tui asked. "And what if he doesn't like me like that? Lego treats everyone with a lot of affection. Maybe I'm just—one person in a long line of people he cares about."

Hong let out a soft chuckle, shaking his head as his messy silver hair fell into his bare eyes. "William let it slip one day when we were drinking," Hong said. "Trust me, the kid has it bad for you. It's written all over his face when he looks at you. Has been for months."

Tui sighed, leaning back against the refrigerator. His eyes drifted toward the closed bedroom door.

"I'm just not sure," Tui said, his voice carrying the weight of someone who had been thinking about this for a long time. "What if I misread everything and end up ruining what we have right now? The group is already fractured enough. I don't want to make things weird for him. I don't want to risk losing him."

Hong rolled his eyes. A familiar, playful smirk returned to his face as he picked up his coffee mug. He took a slow sip, looking at Tui with a challenging gleam in his eye.

"Look," Hong said, "Lego is cute, he's young, and he's not going to wait around forever while you overthink it. If you keep dragging your feet, he's going to get tired of waiting and end up going out with someone else. In fact, if you don't move fast, maybe I'll just steal him away myself. He wears my clothes better than I do anyway."

Tui shot him a glare, though his chest felt lighter. "You wouldn't dare."

"Try me." Hong smirked.

Before Tui could even process the threat or snap back, the soft click of the bedroom door turning interrupted them.

Both boys snapped their heads around.

Lego stood in the doorway.

He was still in his loose pajama top and pink underwear. His eyes were sleepy and his hair was a beautiful, chaotic mess—the half-ponytail completely undone, the dark waves falling across his shoulders and down his back. He leaned his shoulder against the doorframe, crossing his arms as he looked back and forth between Hong's smirk and Tui's visibly flushing face.

"Now I understand why Nut always says not to give my house password to just anyone," Lego said, his voice dry and sleepy despite the early hour. "You two are plotting my downfall before I've even had my tea."

Hong's smirk widened into a full grin.

"Good morning to you too, Shorty." Hong said.